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ABSTRACT

Reading workshop employs teaching methods to accomplish the goals of preparing self-disciplined readers who read and write by choice, motivating students to read and write because of a genuine interest, and developing students who learn to read and write by doing. Reading Workshop came into existence as a reaction to the disproportionate amount of time students spend on completing worksheets. A typical Reading Workshop period would include these five components: (1) sharing time; (2) mini-lesson; (3) state-of-the-class, in which teacher and students review responsibilities and progress they have made; (4) self-selected reading and response; and (5) sharing time. When given the opportunity to explore topics of interest while being taught reading strategies, even the lowest readers can be successful. (RS)

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READING WORKSHOP

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Literacy Research and Reports

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Reading Workshop

Imagine walking into a classroom that at first glance appears noisy, chaotic, unfocused. As you near the groups of students, you hear one student telling about how she has a little sister who is just like Ramona. You hear another asking if anyone else in the group was confused by what happened in chapter three. What at first appeared to be an "unstructured" environment is actually a structured environment designed to give students the opportunity to explore their interests in reading and writing through choice. What you have entered into is a Reading Workshop classroom.

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, only 15 to 25% of students learn well with a traditional teacher-centered approach. What about the 75 to 85% of the students teachers fail to reach? The National Training Laboratories in Bethel, Maine have found the following retention rates: lecture - 5%, reading - 10%, audiovisual - 20%, demonstration - 30%, discussion group - 50%, practice by doing - 75%, teach other/immediate use of learning - 90% (Ryan, 1990, p. 16). Reaching, at best, 25% of all students through a teacher-centered approach is ineffective. Perhaps a shift in focus is necessary. According to retention rates research, two of the best teaching methods available are students teaching others and students immediately using their learning. Practicing by doing comes in a close third followed by discussion groups. It seems logical to conclude that if a reading program employs these methods, it will reach more students than the traditional teacher-centered model. Reading workshop employs teaching methods to accomplish the goals of having self-disciplined readers who read and write by choice, who are motivated to read and write because of a genuine interest, and who learn to read and write by doing.

Reading Workshop came into existence as a reaction to the disproportionate amount of time students spend on completing worksheets. If students are to improve their reading and/or writing, doesn't it make sense that students spend time practicing those desired skills? Typically children in primary and intermediate grades spend between seven and 15 minutes per day reading independently (Anderson,

Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985): Would a baseball player make it to the big leagues if s/he only practiced batting for seven to 15 minutes per day?

One of the main goals of Reading Workshop is to get students reading. In, In the Middle: Writing, Reading, and Learning with Adolescents, Nancy Atwell establishes four criteria that need to be considered in organizing for effective reading instruction. First, students should be given choices in how they spend their time. Second, activities need to promote the importance of reading as the primary activity integrated with writing, listening, and speaking. Third, the teacher needs to model the importance of reading by example. Fourth, opportunities to use and share reading strategies through writing, speaking, and assessment of individual progress must be abundant.

Meeting these criteria as well as maintaining the standards set at state, district, and school levels can seem overwhelming. The consensus in the literature is to start slowly. Set aside one or two days each week to try Reading Workshop. As fear of change subsides and evidence of student growth becomes apparent, Reading Workshop might gradually infiltrate the remaining days of the school week. A typical Reading Workshop period would include these five components: (1) Sharing time, (2) Mini-lesson, (3) State-of-the-class, (4) Self-selected reading and response, and (5) Sharing time (Reutzel & Cooter, 1991).

Sharing time occurs during the first five to ten minutes of the period. During this time the teacher tries to "hook" students into reading by talking about possible free reading selections. This time can also be used to "set up" the mini-lesson. The mini-lesson also takes five to ten minutes. During this portion of the workshop, the teacher demonstrates reading strategies and responds to student needs that have become apparent through workshop activities. A five minute state-of-the-class portion allows the teacher and students to review responsibilities and progress they have made.

The next portion of Reading Workshop, self-selected reading and response, is divided into three types of activities: self-selected reading, literature response, and individual reading conferences. Self-selected reading activities account for more than half the time allotted for Reading Workshop. This section

begins with all students and the teacher engaging in ten minutes of free reading. At the end of this period, some students continue reading while others meet in their literature response groups to read and respond to certain pieces of literature and to develop related projects. Those who are not participating in a literature response group have several options, such as reading to accomplish goals of their reading-response group, engaging in free reading, updating state of class chart and reading response logs, or signing up for individual conferences. The teacher meets with individual students at the end of each Reading Workshop. S/he may set up standards for each student's required conferences in a given time period. During these conferences, the teacher and student discuss individual needs and set individual goals. The final minutes in Reading Workshop involve student sharing. Students may share whatever their group is working on (e.g., good book, a favorite poem).

When the teacher considers implementing Reading Workshop, s/he shoud reflect upon the advantages. Learners read and write daily. There are frequent opportunities for feedback and guidance both by the teacher and other students. Students get the opportunity to formulate and express their ideas in pairs, small groups, and whole class formats. New ideas are welcomed and mistakes are opportunities for growth. Students are an integral part of the goal setting process. Individual needs are accounted for by individually setting goals. Each student is assessed based on individual growth. Teachers model a variety of strategies while interacting with the students or doing mini-lessons. Students develop self-discipline through setting goals and achieving them. They are given the tools and the opportunity to acquire their own knowledge.

By setting up Reading Workshop, teachers give the responsibility for reading and writing back to students. Students see that they do have control over their learning and that learning can be fun when they have options. When given the opportunity to explore topics of interest while being taught reading strategies, even the lowest readers can be successful.

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